

Castle Touts Port of Wilmington for Improving Security -- October 31, 2007

Washington, DC -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle had the opportunity to participate in today's House Homeland Security Committee hearing on the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) port security program. In July 2004, the 9/11 Commission issued an extensive report detailing the challenges facing the government in the wake of the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. The 9/11 report contained critical recommendations, and port security has emerged as a significant part of this debate. Rep. Castle was asked to take part in the hearing not only because of his efforts to improve port security but also since Delaware's Port of Wilmington was selected as the first port in the country to begin implementing TWIC. Witnesses on the panel included representatives from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the Coast Guard, Delaware River Maritime Exchange, and the New York/New Jersey Port Authority among others. Rep. Castle had the opportunity to discuss the benefits of this program for Delaware, as well as to question witnesses about the initial stages of the program and efforts to improve security while working with unions and other leaders to ensure commerce remains strong at the Port of Wilmington.

"On the Delaware River, the Port of Wilmington is among the busiest terminals, handling hundreds of vessels and millions of tons of cargo annually. It is the world's largest fruit port and with overnight access to one third of all U.S. and Canadian consumers, it is well established a crucial source of commerce in the northeast," Castle said. "Once these ships reach our ports, it is vital that we have effective procedures in place for screening personnel and ensuring the integrity of critical infrastructure.

"The TWIC program is one such initiative, which will use cutting edge biometric technology to ensure security officials can protect against unauthorized use of our nation's seaports. As a former member of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, I am a firm believer in the potential of TWIC and other biometric technologies to improve security and protect Americans.

"Implementing TWIC has been a long process, beginning with the pilot program in 2002 at the Port of Wilmington. Over the last several months, my staff has been in close contact with port representatives, industry stakeholders, and local officials to facilitate communication with TSA and to help make certain that employees are provided every opportunity to comply with these new requirements. As this program moves forward at the Port of Wilmington, it is imperative that the government work closely with port workers and local leadership to address all possible concerns and questions that may arise during the enrollment process. This is an enormous undertaking, and it will take a real team effort to see it through to the finish.

"In the end, a truly successful international maritime security strategy will effectively increase security, while minimizing the impact on trade. One key lesson learned from the mass confusion of September 11th and Hurricane Katrina is that our government has a significant information-sharing problem. From the TSA down to state and local security personnel, timely information-sharing and communication with private industry are crucial to

improving our ability to accurately identify and respond to threats."

###